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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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11. Mideast

12. Iraq

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Key stories in the media:  
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Last night, Channel 2-TV reported that PM Sharon is "enraged" with IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon, whom he accuses of having caused "enormous" damage and of "blatantly intervening in political matters and trying to influence ministers." Ha'aretz reported that Sharon's bureau later denied the report. All media cited remarks Ya'alon allegedly made against a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip "under fire." Yediot reported that the political Right sides with Ya'alon, while the Left claims that he should not discuss the disengagement plan.

Maariv (Ben Caspit) reported that top Sharon aide Dov Weisglass will leave for Washington only if Sharon gives "satisfactory" answers about his disengagement plan to the U.S. team arriving on Thursday (Stephen Hadley and Elliott Abrams from the White House and William Burns from the State Department). Maariv wrote: "Washington is demanding many goods of Sharon in exchange for very little." Leading media reported that Shin Bet head Avi Dichter has arrived in Washington to meet with senior U.S. intelligence and National Security officials. Yediot quoted him as saying that it is doubtful whether the disengagement plan will prevent Palestinian terrorism. Israel Radio's Washington correspondent says that the U.S. decision-makers view Dichter as an authority on doings in the PA, who has no political slant and is not attempting to promote or thwart plans by Sharon. Hatzofe quoted Vice PM Ehud Olmert as saying in Berlin Monday, following his meeting with German FM Joschka Fischer, that Israel is committed to the road map and that, should there be a need for them, Israel would take unilateral steps for that purpose.

Jerusalem Post led with a statement issued by Hamas Monday that it would continue its attacks on Israel even after the planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, in order to "liberate the rest of Palestine." The movement also denied reports that it is planning to seize control of the Strip after Israel withdraws. Leading media cited Hamas's admission that it had carried out the bombing of the Mike's Place pub in Tel Aviv in April 2003. Maariv reported that instructions for building Qassam rockets are posted on the Izzedine Al Qassam (Hamas military branch) web site.

Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres was quoted as saying in various media interviews that Israel's mistake had been not to pull out from the Gaza Strip long ago. Hatzofe reported that uprooting the Gaza Strip settlements would cause economic harm to 30,000 Palestinians.

Yediot and Israel Radio quoted State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher as saying Monday: "We do recognize Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism -- terrorist attacks, and we always urge Israel to consider the consequences of any actions it might wish to take. But we also urge the Israeli government to take all appropriate precautions to prevent death or injury of innocent civilians or damage to civil and humanitarian infrastructure. At the same time, we believe the best way to move forward is for

the Palestinian Authority to begin by making an effort against terror and violence, an effort that's far more serious than the one that they have made over the past few years."

Ha'aretz reported on the growing discontent of Shinui ministers and Knesset members over the government's policy. The latest reason for their disgruntlement is that they feel affected, as coalition members, by criticism of Sharon's handling of the Elchanan Tenenbaum affair.

Maariv reported that Knesset security marked the hard hats of Israeli Arab construction workers at the Knesset's construction site with X signs. The newspaper says that this is done so that they can clearly be monitored and differentiated from foreign workers. The newspaper cited strong protests by Israeli Arab Knesset members.

Jerusalem Post reported that highlighting his concern with the rise of anti-Semitism worldwide, Secretary of State Colin Powell told Jewish leaders from the World Jewish Congress (WJC) that he may attend a conference on the issue, hosted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) next month in Berlin. The newspaper also reported that Powell expressed interest in backing an Irish-sponsored resolution that unequivocally condemns anti-Semitism, which was withdrawn near the end of the UN's annual General Assembly session after several Arab and Muslim countries voiced their objections to its message. Jerusalem Post also reported that Powell told the WJC leaders that the U.S. opposes any Iraqi legislation excluding Jews or others from restoring their citizenship, and that no such discrimination was written into the new Iraqi constitution.

Leading media reported that Gen. Tommy Franks, the retired head of CENTCOM, is visiting Israel. Some media noted that he came to mark the beginning of the joint Israeli-Jordanian Bridging the Rift science project in the Arava. Yediot quoted him as saying Monday at a meeting with the top brass of the IDF and the defense establishment: "I do not think Iraq will turn into a peaceful nation in my lifetime." The newspaper also quoted him as saying that if the U.S. knew the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden, he would already have been dead. Jerusalem Post quoted Franks as saying that he supports the disengagement plan.

Ha'aretz cited Palestinian claims that Monday two Palestinians were killed by the IDF in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Leading media reported that hundreds of Palestinian villagers, backed up by International Solidarity Mission volunteers from overseas, clashed with IDF forces protecting the bulldozers working on the route of the separation fence near Beit Lakiyah and Beit Daky, not far from the settlement of Mevo Horon, northwest of Jerusalem. Ten Palestinians were reportedly wounded and a soldier and two of the workers on the fence suffered light wounds. Leading media reported that drunken ultra-Orthodox Jews attacked Arab cab drivers and Israeli policemen in Jerusalem during the Purim holiday Monday.

Ha'aretz reported that at his first meeting with Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala) Monday, British PM Tony Blair urged him to meet with Sharon. Ha'aretz also reported that despite the statements of senior EU and British officials, Hamas's political wing has not been added to the British and EU lists of proscribed international groups.

Ha'aretz reported that Monday the right-wing group The Temple Mount Faithful petitioned the High Court of Justice to order the Israel Antiquities Authority to supervise projects taking place on the Temple Mount. The supervisors say that the projects, carried out by the Waqf Muslim religious trust, are "the continuation of the mount's Islamization and the removal of all Jewish remnants from it, while destroying and robbing everything, in violation of the law, in an essentially Jewish place and a cultural cradle to the entire world."

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that next week four representatives of the Israeli conscientious objectors network will appear before the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where they will speak out against the "the GOI's double game, presenting itself as the only democracy in the Middle East, while trampling on basic democratic values in the occupation, or throwing conscientious objectors into jail." Ha'aretz notes that the trip is being sponsored by the United Left, a group of leftist parliamentarians from various European

countries.

All media reported on the signing of the interim Iraqi constitution Monday. Israel Radio reported that the U.S. protested to Syria about the brief detention of an American diplomat who was monitoring a human rights demonstration on Monday.

Ha'aretz reported that the Arab League plans to set up Pan-Arab institutions: a parliament, a security council and a tribunal.

Ha'aretz cited the results of Tel Aviv University's Peace Index poll:

-64 percent of Israeli Jews believe that Israel should not take into account the suffering caused to the Palestinians by the route of the fence; 17 percent of Israeli Arabs hold the same view.

-70 percent of Israeli Jews support the continuation of the assassination policy as a necessary measure to reduce acts of terrorism; 4 percent of Israeli Arabs have the same view.

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**I**1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had provided greater clarity about his disengagement plan in Gaza and Judea and Samaria [i.e. the territories], he might have avoided the many critical remarks he's hearing -- and not only from the army and the defense establishment."

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz: "When it comes to the influence of political calculations on foreign policy and especially the influence of the Jewish lobby on Middle East policy, American presidents in their second and last term are very different from what they were as brand new presidents."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel's moral, security and political resilience is not measured by the balance of death and terror in Gaza and Jerusalem."

Nationalist writer Hagai Segal commented in popular, pluralist Maariv: "It's impossible to imprison 1.2 million Arabs behind a fence without gates and to tell them to live in autocracy."

Veteran journalist Evelyn Gordon wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Only if an individual wishes to affirm Israeli sovereignty does foreign policy suddenly become sacrosanct. That, it seems, is State's idea of an 'even-handed' approach to the conflict."

Block Quotes:  
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**I**I. "The Generals Prefer Coordination"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 9): "If Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had provided greater clarity about his disengagement plan in Gaza and Judea and Samaria [i.e. the territories], he might have avoided the many critical remarks he's hearing -- and not only from the army and the defense establishment.... The current dispute appears to stem from a belief among the general staff, including the Chief of Staff and key generals, that Israel should be striving for an agreement with the Palestinians requiring them to take responsibility in various areas, instead of undertaking a unilateral disengagement. They think a unilateral move practically guarantees the fighting will continue, and the Palestinians will regard a unilateral move as their victory, so they will go on wanting to fight. Senior officers say that if the government wants the disengagement plan to work, there must be prior coordination with the Palestinians and others. But Sharon doesn't want that. Some are even prepared for 'soft' international involvement, which Sharon certainly cannot accept.... There is also criticism of the way Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan basically throws out much of what the army regards as the achievements of Operation Defensive Shield. A disengagement without any agreement will turn into withdrawal under fire and certain continued conflict."

**II.** "Meanwhile, the Only Disengagement Is Bush From Sharon"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz (March 9): "[Seeing Bush] talking with Sharon about giving territory to the Arabs will not please the conservatives and evangelist contributors. The White House has told the Prime Minister's Office that no Jew will be evacuated from Gaza before the presidential election. That's all Bush needs -- American TV cameras showing his Middle East vision being trampled by Arabs charging into abandoned settlements, and how his road map disappeared behind the smoke of American flags going up in flames in what remains of Netzarim [in the Gaza Strip]. Apparently, the most convenient way out of the problem is to postpone the meeting with Sharon until after the elections. If he wins. Meanwhile, to save the honor of his vision and leave something of the road map, Bush has to constrain Sharon, meaning make sure the Prime Minister does not turn Gaza First into Gaza Last. The campaign advisers are recommending he keep things vague. After all, how many voters in Florida care that Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayyad left Washington last week with an American promise that the withdrawal will also include territory in the West Bank? According to a classified report reaching Jerusalem, Fayyad got the promise straight from National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell. He convinced them

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that an Israeli disengagement only from Gaza could perpetuate the occupation in the West Bank and eliminate any chances for a peace agreement.... When it comes to the influence of political calculations on foreign policy and especially the influence of the Jewish lobby on Middle East policy, American presidents in their second and last term are very different from what they were as brand new presidents."

III. "The Routine of Death"

Ha'aretz editorialized (March 9): "Experience shows that operations in the heart of the densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip end routinely with the deaths of innocent civilians. Often, the operations are indicative of faulty judgment, if not utter indifference, in the uppermost political and military echelons. They don't take into account the long-term damage when a civilian population is terrorized for the sake of the temporary achievement of 'provoking armed men into exposing themselves'.... The argument that the Palestinians have no compunctions about using children as 'human shields' does not absolve the IDF of responsibility for their safety. On the contrary.... The time has come for the makers of policy and those who implement it to drop the illusion of a military solution to the conflict; until a political solution is found, they should take care to make wise and controlled use of force. Israel's moral, security and political resilience is not measured by the balance of death and terror in Gaza and Jerusalem. The preparations for disengagement from parts of Gaza and the West Bank must be accompanied by an effort to calm the borders with our neighbors and break out of the cycle of violence."

IV. "Better Stay in Gaza"

Nationalist writer Hagai Segal commented in popular, pluralist Ma'ariv (March 9): "Even if Israel evacuated [the settlements of] Gush Katif and Netzarim, it would have to continue operating [the Erez Crossing], because it's impossible to imprison 1.2 million Arabs behind a fence without gates and to tell them to live in autocracy.... Poverty would quickly develop to African proportions. The entire world would scream ... and demand that Israel lift the siege.... Furthermore, transferring Gaza from Israeli to Egyptian rule would mean changing one occupation for another; even the Left would find it morally hard to explain such a move.... The Erez Crossing could turn into an escape route for refugees, but in an opposite direction [i.e. into Israel]. Wouldn't the current situation -- no matter how tough it is -- be better?"

V. "Stateless in Jerusalem"

Veteran journalist Evelyn Gordon wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 9): "Congress enacted an explicit law in 2003 stating that if an American citizen is born in Jerusalem, 'the Secretary [of State] shall, upon the request of the citizen or the citizen's legal guardian, record the place of birth as Israel.' Nevertheless, the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv refused to register [a] baby's birthplace as Israel.... The extent of the bias is even more astonishing, however, when one considers State's claim, expounded in its response to

the lawsuit [filed by the baby's parents in an American court], that non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem is so central to American policy that the 2003 law would constitute an unconstitutional infringement on the executive's right to set foreign policy unless the court reinterpreted the 'shall' in the law to mean 'may' -- thereby allowing State to continue refusing to register people born in Jerusalem as born in Israel.... Thus State is perfectly willing to subordinate American foreign policy to the individual's wishes if the goal is to deny Israeli sovereignty. Only if an individual wishes to affirm Israeli sovereignty does foreign policy suddenly become sacrosanct. That, it seems, is State's idea of an 'even-handed' approach to the conflict."

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12. Iraq:  
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Summary:  
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Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Monday, Iraqis showed that Arab democracy need not be a contradiction in terms. The region's future depends on the success of Iraq's bold experiment."

Block Quotes:  
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"The Birth of Iraqi Democracy"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 9): "Freedom and independence rarely come without a struggle, as Americans and Israelis know. The road ahead for Iraqi democracy is a long one and the outcome is not guaranteed. Monday's signing [of the interim constitution], however, was undoubtedly an historic moment in the history of Iraq, the Middle East, and the world.... This is a proud moment for Iraqis and for the United States, which made it possible. We should not lose sight of where it is taking place.... Bernard Lewis, the eminent scholar of the Islamic world, once noted the strange fact that the Europeans who oppose American pressure on Arabs to democratize are considered the 'friends' of the Arab world. They are not. They are friends of Arab despots, not the silenced millions they rule. Monday, Iraqis showed that Arab democracy need not be a contradiction in terms. The region's future depends on the success of Iraq's bold experiment."

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